

The 'cop' who was not (supposed to be) there

by Jonn G. Christian

Mark S. Armbruster was a pre-law student at UCLA when he and a fellow student, Harry Sloan, arrived at the RFK victory celebration at 8 p.m.

The following account of Armbruster's encounter with an individual who represented himself as an LAPD sergeant is taken from a Special Unit Senator interview identified as I-1675 and dated August 19, 1978. The report was among the documents released by the State Archivist last April.

"... He (Armbruster) went down to the Ambassador Ballroom for about an hour, after which he went back upstairs. He tried to enter the Embassy Room by going through the kitchen. While walking through the kitchen two men approached him, one a security guard in uniform, and the other in a suit. The man in the suit stated 'I'm a sergeant, Los Angeles Police Department, you can't come in here.' The man produced some sort of badge and then withdrew it. Mark then left the kitchen and walked back into the lobby of the Embassy Room. Upon leaving the kitchen Mark observed the man who stated he was a sergeant, position the uniformed guard outside the kitchen doors. Mark didn't think much of the incident until he heard via the news media that there were no LAPD officers present at the hotel prior to the shooting. Mark describes this man as a M/C 30's, 6-1, 170, dark hair with slight touch of gray. ... He has not been contacted by the news media or the FBI."

In May 1988, author Christian phoned Armbruster at his Century City law office. (He's now a successful entertainment law-

yer). His recollections of the above events remained impressed in his mind.

Asked why he thought SUS waited two months to interview him, Armbruster answered, "They took down our names, addresses and phone numbers (his and Sloan's) that night. But nobody called me.

"When I kept on hearing TV reports that there were no LAPD officers at the hotel before the shooting, I called them. I told them what you just read to me from their report.

"I guess they weren't interested, because nobody called me back (after the August 19 interview)."

We sent the Armbruster "Interview" to Paul Sharaga for his analysis. Sharaga was a 20-year LAPD veteran, and was the first police officer to respond to a call for help and to arrive at the Ambassador after Kennedy was killed.

Sharaga had the following to say about the Armbruster report: "If, in fact, the quoted portion 'I am a Sergeant, Los Angeles Police Department, you can't come in here,' is correct, then I would have to argue that he was not, in fact, a LAPD sergeant. I have never heard an officer or a supervisor identify himself in such a manner regardless of length of time on the job. Identification would be, 'I am Sgt. (so and so), LAPD (or division of assignment), and he would display his badge and I.D. card. . . . We are creatures of habit and training and as such would be prone to follow a much used procedure without even realizing it (I still do it, only I add 'retired.')."

"If this is a doctored report, they did not do a very good job," Sharaga said.



Sandy Serrano-Sewell during June 10, 1968 LAPD-SUS re-enactment at the Ambassador Hotel. Photos: LAPD-SUS records/State Archives.